NEWS ANALYSIS #1-1037 7-12-76
RONALD J. DUNLAVEY

THE EXECUTIONS IN ANGOLA

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE EXECUTION BY THE ANGOLA GOVERNMENT OF FOUR MERCENARIES:

VOICE: ON SATURDAY PRESIDENT AUGUSTIN NETO OF ANGOLA ANNOUNCED THE EXECUTION OF FOUR MEN WHO HAD BEEN TRIED AND CONVICTED OF MERCENARY ACTIVITY IN THE RECENT ANGOLAN CIVIL WAR. THREE OF THE MEN WERE BRITISH; ONE WAS AN AMERICAN.

THE REACTION HERE--AND NO DOUBT ELSEWHERE--WAS ONE OF SURPRISE. AFTER ALL, IT WAS WELL-KNOWN THAT AT LEAST TWO OF THE FOUR MEN HAD NOT BEEN IN ANGOLA LONG AND HAD NOT TAKEN A REAL PART IN THE FIGHTING. MANY PEOPLE HAD ASSUMED THAT PRESIDENT NETO WOULD BE RESPONSIVE TO THE APPEALS WHICH HAD BEEN MADE ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS NOT ONLY BY THE AMERICAN AND BRITISH GOVERNMENTS BUT ALSO BY SUCH ORGANIZATIONS AS THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS.

HERE IN THE UNITED STATES THERE MAY WELL BE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF POPULAR ANGER, DUE TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CASE. HAD THE AMERICAN VICTIM BEEN A HARDENED MERCENARY WHO HAD BEEN SERIOUSLY INVOLVED IN THE WAR, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT HIS FATE WOULD HAVE AROUSED MUCH SYMPATHY. BUT THE FACT THAT HE HAD ONLY BEEN IN ANGOLA FOR A FEW DAYS AND HAD NOT ACTUALLY PARTICIPATED IN THE FIGHTING HAVE BEEN SEEN HERE TO BE MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MADE THE DEATH PENALTY--AS PRESIDENT FORD EXPRESSED IT--"UNJUSTIFIED AND UNWARRANTED."

SOME AMERICANS ARE ALSO LIKELY TO BE AROUSED BY THE FACT THAT THE SENTENCE WAS BASED ON DUBIOUS LEGAL GROUNDS--AND BY SUSPICION THAT PRESIDENT NETO ALLOWED POLITICAL MOTIVES TO OVERRIDE HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS. IN ADDITION, THE BELIEF HAS BEEN EXPRESSED THAT PRESIDENT NETO DELIBERATELY SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE WHAT SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER CALLED "A DELIBERATELY HOSTILE ACT" TOWARD THE UNITED STATES. "AS SUCH," ADDED MISTER KISSINGER, "IT CANNOT BUT AFFECT ADVERSELY THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND ANGOLA."

WHAT THE CONSEQUENCES MIGHT BE ARE A MATTER FOR SPECULATION. SOME OBSERVERS SEE PRESIDENT NETO'S ACT AS FURTHER HARDENING PUBLIC OPINION HERE AGAINST FUTURE EFFORTS BY ANGOLA TO GAIN ADMITTANCE TO THE UNITED NATIONS. OTHERS THINK IT WILL AFFECT THE PROSPECTS FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF BILATERAL DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC TIES; IN THE WORDS OF ONE AMERICAN NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL, MISTER NETO "HAS FAILED TO USE A CLEAR-CUT OPPORTUNITY TO EARN GOODWILL FROM SEVERAL INDUSTRIAL NATIONS WHOSE ASSISTANCE ANGOLA COULD USE." UP TO NOW, WASHINGTON'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE NEW ANGOLA GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN LARGELY PREDICATED ON THE ISSUE OF THE CUBAN TROOPS. NOW, THAT ATTITUDE MAY BE INFLUENCED BY A NEW AND EMOTIONAL FACTOR AFFECTING BOTH PUBLIC SENSITIVITY AND OFFICIAL THINKING.

-0-

CCM